

## Towards Enhancing Entrepreneurship Development in Oman

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### Principal Topic

Sultanate of Oman, an oil-based economy in the Arabian Gulf, has launched some initiatives for entrepreneurship development and this paper reviews and illustrates the role of entrepreneurship education and training in fostering enterprise development in the country. Beginning with a brief introduction of Oman economy, a review of the emergence of entrepreneurship and small business education in the world, the paper describes the programs and courses currently available in Oman and some other Arabian Gulf countries and recommends ways to further enhance enterprise development in the country. Professor Michael Porter's (2004) views on launching a comprehensive entrepreneurship development program in Oman has also been reviewed in this paper.

### Methodology/Key Propositions

This paper is an exploratory study which is based on a comprehensive literature review and identification and analysis of relevant entrepreneurship development programs in Oman. For the society and communities, entrepreneurship provides means for achieving the level of diversity, innovation and independent decision-making required for survival, development and freedom (Shapero, 1985). In fact, entrepreneurship education and training can result in some unique benefits which may not be usually obtained in other types of higher learning. McMullan and Long (1990) suggest that, first of all, payoffs are not only long-term and diffuse as is typical in higher education but also short term and measurably focused. Secondly, the payoffs are also substantial as there are large in-process payoffs which can be obtained from student contribution to community ventures (McMullan, Long and Graham, 1986) and there are jobs which graduates frequently create.

This paper illustrates and comments on several entrepreneurship education and training programs in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. It also identifies some relevant programs in the Arab world including details of the initiatives in Oman. Intilaaqah, Sanad, the Knowledge Mine(TKM) at Knowledge Oasis Muscat and the Sultan Qaboos University are some of the major institutions involved in this endeavor in Oman.

Intilaaqah, a non-profit organization modeled after a Shell-funded initiative called "LiveWIRE," Intilaaqah prepares and encourages unemployed young Omanis to consider the option of starting and owning their own business, and provides assistance to those who wish to take that option. Intilaaqah offers four main services, free of charge, to young Omanis that include: training, workshops, counseling and annual award to best entrepreneurs. A Ministry of Manpower-sponsored program called SANAD (means 'support' in English) was launched with a focus on Omanization which is aimed at enhancing business opportunities for the nationals. Main objectives of this program are: - Maximum employment of Omanis in all sectors of business activities. - To enhance and sponsor, develop and popularize self-employment initiatives. - To provide relevant training and development of the citizen - To establish nursery committee to support nationals with self-employment. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry established an IT village, called "Knowledge Oasis Muscat" that supports and encourages the creation of technology-dependent start-ups. It provides an affordable working environment for companies and entrepreneurs through business incubator centers.

Entrepreneurship Courses at Sultan Qaboos University The College of Commerce and Economics at this national university currently offers two courses in entrepreneurship: Small and Family Business Management and Entrepreneurship. In view of increasing interest and importance of such courses, the College leadership is currently considering to offer more courses in entrepreneurship and small business; and is planning to eventually offer a track/major in the field. The newly launched MBA program at the Sultan Qaboos University also offers Entrepreneurship as a management elective course.

Michael Porter's views on Entrepreneurship in Oman In his special lecture on 'Competitiveness and Economic Development: Implications for Oman', delivered at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman on 1 December 2004, Porter presented a detailed analysis of Omani economy, its competitiveness and industry structure, comparison with regional and international economies and identified some important priorities (Porter, 2004). This paper also presents a review and comment on his views.

### **Results and Implications**

While the training and education provided by the colleges and universities remains the requirement of the academic programs, the initiative and efforts by Intilaaqah, Sanad and TKM provide the participants with encouragement and some experience on how to start and manage their own business. Although these different organizations are trying to attract and train different groups of individuals, apparently there is no coordination among them. Given the importance of entrepreneurship in Oman, this paper argues that a national office could be set up that will initiate a comprehensive entrepreneurship development program and oversee its implementation and coordination across the country. Specific recommendations have been made in this paper for such a comprehensive program.

In order to attract bright students for entrepreneurial career, Universities and Colleges in the country could also be encouraged to design and offer short courses/programs like New Enterprise Program and Graduate Enterprise Program launched in the UK or the Enterprise Development Program launched in the Ireland. Increasing social acceptability of taking entrepreneurial path, what Porter calls 'cultural barriers to entrepreneurship' need to be taken seriously and addressed with due care and this paper offers suggestions as to how to overcome such cultural barriers in Oman.

The authors identified Mohammed bin Rashid Establishment for Young Business Leaders in Dubai which has adopted a comprehensive approach toward entrepreneurship development. Since they are operating in similar socio-economic environment, authors believe that their experience will be more relevant for any entrepreneurship development program in Oman. This paper essentially echoes and enhances the views of Michael Porter (2004) who asserted that Oman's competitive strategy should include a priority emphasis on comprehensive entrepreneurship development.

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